**  
Definitions of Governance in Health**

**7.1.3**

The complete RHIS curriculum is available here: <https://www.measureevaluation.org/our-work/routine-health-information-systems/rhis-curriculum>

**Governance in the Health Sector** World Health Organization (WHO)1

Governance in the health sector refers to a wide range of steering and rule-making related functions carried out by governments/decision makers as they seek to achieve national health policy objectives that are conducive to universal health coverage. Governance is a political process that involves balancing competing influences and demands. It includes:

* maintaining the strategic direction of policy development and implementation;
* detecting and correcting undesirable trends and distortions;
* articulating the case for health in national development;
* regulating the behavior of a wide range of actors - from healthcare financiers to healthcare providers; and
* establishing transparent and effective accountability

**WHO Glossary**[[1]](#footnote-1)

Governance

1. the exercise of political, economic and administrative authority in the management of a country's affairs at all levels, comprising the complex mechanisms, processes, relationships and institutions through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their rights and obligations and mediate their differences.
2. the traditions and institutions by which authority in a country is exercised for the common good, including the processes by which those in authority are selected, monitored and replaced; the capacity of the government to effectively manage its resources and implement sound policies; and the respect of citizens and the state for the institutions that govern economic and social interactions among them;
3. the process of creating an organizational vision and mission— what it will be and what it will do —in addition to defining the goals and objectives that should be met to achieve the vision and mission; of articulating the organization, its owners and the policies that derive from these values —policies concerning the options that its members should have in order to achieve the desired outcomes; and adopting the management necessary for achieving those results and a performance evaluation of the managers and the organization as a whole.

**Governance in health**: First framed by WHO as stewardship, defined as “the careful and responsible management of the well-being of the population.” This has evolved through various stages as stewardship, leadership, and/or governance. Includes: health policy formulation (defining the vision and direction of health system), regulation (setting fair rules of the game with a level playing field), and intelligence (assessing performance and sharing information. The broad concept of governance–encompasses systems of representation and citizen engagement, accountability, power and institutional authority, ownership, political stability and the rule of law. There is a general consensus that the governance function characterizes a set of processes (customs, policies, or laws) that are formally or informally applied to distribute responsibility or accountability among actors in a given (health) system.

**Governance for Health** WHO/Europe[[2]](#footnote-2)

Governance for health is defined as the attempts of governments or other actors to steer communities, countries, or groups of countries in the pursuit of health as integral to well-being through both whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches. It positions health and well-being as key features of what constitutes a successful society and a vibrant economy in the 21st century and grounds policies and approaches in such values as human rights and equity. Governance for health promotes joint action of health and nonhealth sectors, of public and private actors, and of citizens for a common interest. It requires a synergistic set of policies, many of which reside in sectors other than health as well as sectors outside government, which must be supported by structures and mechanisms that enable collaboration. It gives strong legitimacy to health ministers and ministries and to public health agencies, to help them reach out and perform new roles in shaping policies to promote health and well-being. Based on a review of case studies of new approaches to governance for health, five types of smart governance for health are proposed for consideration, which should be combined in whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches:

* Governing by collaborating
* Governing by engaging citizens
* Governing by mixing regulation and persuasion
* Governing through independent agencies and expert bodies
* Governing by adaptive policies, resilient structures and foresight.

**Governance in Health** World Bank (2004)

The increased interest in governance has been driven by the need for greater accountability, arising from both increased funding and a growing demand to demonstrate results. An intrinsic aspect of governance, therefore, is *accountability.* This concerns the management of relationships between various stakeholders in health including individuals, households, communities, firms, governments, nongovernmental organizations, private firms, and other entities which have the responsibility to finance, monitor, deliver, and use health services (World Bank 2004). In particular, accountability involves:

a) **Delegation***,* or an understanding (either implicit or explicit) of how services will be supplied;

b) **Financing**to ensure that adequate resources are available to deliver services;

c) **Performance**around the actual supply of services;

d) **Receipt of relevant information**to evaluate or monitor performance; and,

e) **Enforcement***,* which concerns the imposition of sanctions or the provision of rewards for performance

Good Governance in Health Care[[3]](#footnote-3)

Good governance in health systems promotes effective delivery of health services.

Critical are appropriate *standards, incentives, information,* and *accountabilities*, which induce high *performance* from public providers. Sound provider performance in turn, raises the level of health *outputs* (e.g., number of treated patients) and can contribute to improved *outcomes* (e.g., health status).



1. <http://www.who.int/healthsystems/hss_glossary/en/index9.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Kickbusch, I.& Gleicher, D. (2012). Governance for health in the 21st century. Copenhagen, Denmark: World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Lewis, M. & Pettersson, G. (2009). Governance in health care delivery: Raising performance. Policy Research Working Paper WPS 5074. Washington, DC: World Bank. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)